

[Gor Svenson #6]

LIVING LORE Wheeler

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(Resuming the account of a series of interviews with Gor Svenson, Swedish-born American lobsterman who for most of his adult years was a quarry-worker in Rockport and Gloucester, Massachusetts.)

"You know, I never think of it until I am over there. I am in Gloucester two three hours when all at once I stop, I say, " ' Gor, you have not been Gloucester four, five years. " ' Here I am live over Rockport. Gloucester only five miles away. Many times I have days I do nothing. Harr, weeks I do nothing! Many times I have one two dollar I can spend. But I do not go to Gloucester for four, five years until day before yesterday. There was old feller once down to Cove stop, talk to me while I fix my pots. You know what he said? He said he pretty much eighty years old, harr, and never once been off the Cape! American feller, that feller. Born here, that feller. Right on Granite Street. Been Rockport. Been Lanesville. Been Bay View, Rocky Neck, Annisquam. Hundred times been Gloucester. Not once Boston. Not even Lynn, Beverly, Manchester ever. I say that old feller, I say, " ' Why yon don't go Gloucester some time on bus, walk down by statue of fisherman, walk over bridge? Then you can say, "Well, by gosh, once my life I get off Cape?" Why you do not do that, harr? Maybe somebody give you ride. " ' Old feller shake his head. Would not want to do that. Would not want to go over bridge. Would not want he could say, " ' Well, by gosh, once my life I got off Cape. " ' Lots fellers get off Cape. That old feller tell me he rather say, " ' I born on Cape, live eighty years on Cape, never once got off Cape! " ' "

"I get ride over Gloucester myself day before yesterday. I am coming home from Cove two three o'clock, young Finn feller try be plumber, 2 his car is stuck corner Phillips Avenue.

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Something is wrong with starter. He say, “ ‘ Hey, Gor give me push. “ ‘ I push ten, fifteen minutes. Then everything is all right. Starter was stuck. Young Finn feller say, “ ‘ Thanks, Gor. Hey, I got go Gloucester hardware store get basin for new toilet I am putting in down Avenue for summer people. You come Gloucester for ride, harr? I come right back. “ ‘ I get in car with him and we go Gloucester. I wait in car while Finn feller go in hardware store, come right out, say, “ ‘ By gosh, Gor, they got basin, but wrong kind basin. Both hot, cold water come out same tap. Summer woman want that way. She come down Saturday see I do job. She doesn't like job, friend of her's won't give me job put in new toilet her place. I got go Salem right now get basin hot, cold water came out same tap. You come with me, Gor, come right back? “ ‘ I get out that Finn feller's car. I shake my head. I say, “ ‘ You go more than Salem, don't come right back, find tap hot, cold water come out same time! “ ‘

“He is crazy, that Finn feller. I go get some beer. You get beer everywhere Gloucester. No beer Rockport. No nothing Rockport but alcohol. Get alcohol Rockport ———-'. Four, five years ago we have beer in Rockport. Rockport always vote beer, but Pigeon Cove no. They drink beer Pigeon Cove, but vote no. I always vote yes. Yes, beer. Yes, whiskey. Doesn't do any good. No good vote at all, other fellers vote other way. The beer I get Gloucester not very good. Weak, not much taste. I drink one glass, and I say, “ ‘ Maybe something wrong with pipe. Maybe next glass be better. “ ‘ I have another glass. No better. Worse! I have third glass. I think, “ ‘ Maybe not much business. Maybe old beer stuck in pipe. Now I get new beer out of barrel. “ ‘ Third glass no good, too. I tell that bartender. I tell him that third glass no good. I tell him all glasses no good. He says, “ ‘ What the hell! You don't have drink it. Nobody hold your nose! “ ‘ I say, “ ‘ That right. “ ‘ I 3 don't drink no more beer that place. I go out, find other place. I think I find other place. But I get out, feller stop car, ask where is post-office. I tell him I don't know. I know where old post-office is, I tell him. But old post-office no more post-office. [?] They got new postoffice now. Feller ask I know where new post-office is. I tell him no. He tell me go to hell! “ I do not lie that feller. I do not know where that new post-office is. I think myself, “ ‘ Where is that new post-office, harr? “ ‘ I walk up Main Street by waiting station, I stop feller, say, “ ‘ Where

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is that new post-office? “ ‘ Feller say, “Up behind City Hall.” I go take look [?] . That's big building that post-office. That's fine building. When I look it I get sick almost my stomache. I tell you why. That's granite building. Good granite building. Rockport granite. Come from Leonard Johnson's Quarry over Pigeon Cove. Leonard Johnson Swede feller. Come from Sweden poor feller just like me. Work in quarry save money, get own quarry. But that is not why I get sick almost my stomach. How far Providence, harr? Eighty miles Providence, harr? All right. How far new post-office from Leonard Johnson's quarry, harr? Five miles. All right, either.

“In Leonard Johnson's quarry they cut stone. Good stone. But do they finish stone at that quarry? No, by gosh! They take that good stone, ship on Peter Bernard's trucks all way Providence, finish stone Providence, bring back Gloucester! Every stone go into post-office get nice ride way to Providence, nice ride back! You think that is right? You think that is what they should do, harr? It makes me sick almost to my stomach!

“Two three weeks age lots Swede quarry-fellers all excited. Used be quarry fellers, I mean. Now lobster fellers like me, fish fellers, WPA fellers, nothing fellers. They go round everywhere, say, “ ‘ You know what that Bates tell that Congress? No tell that Congress get a lot of money, send to Rockport, finish bread-water! Three, four hundred fellers get 4 job two three years, take out stone, make Rockport breakwater all done, make Rockport harbor best barber world. Big enough whole United States Navy. “ ‘ Rockport harbor big enough whole United States Navy now. I see whole United States Navy Rockport harbor five six times. Could get Swede navy in that harbor, too. But not in storm. Storm come up, most from northeast, blow United States Navy, Swede Navy all over Beach Street. If they finish break-water, though, storm could not blow nothing.

“Those Swede quarry fellers all excited. All excited but me. I say, “ ‘ What the hell? Whatyou care, harr? Even if Congress give that Bates that money finish that break-water no jobs you me. Jobs Providence! “ ‘ Well Congress do not give that Bates that money, anyway. I do not know why. One feller, Finn feller say Congress think maybe fix up

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Rockport Harbor all right for United States Navy, than all right Hitler navy, England Navy, [?] either Don't fix harbor no good United States Navy, no good Hitler navy, England Navy, too!

"I don't know that right, but Rockport important place in war. Nearest place to Europe, Rockport. You go down Turk's Head Inn sometime, look out to see by Thatcher's Light, see boats of to Europe, come from Europe. Boats go to Europe, last place see Rockport. Come from Europe, first place see Rockport. There used be cable station over Headlands, got wires run right to Europe. No more, though. Got radio. Not at Headlands. And last war, they have soldiers here and big guns. By railroad station. Out to sea those big guns shoot fifteen, twenty miles. Break every window in Rockport. Army has to pay when they break windows. Sometime break dishes, either. ?

"They got guns over Portsmouth now. Guns to shoot air-planes. When they shoot those guns now make things jump Pigeon Cove, Lanesville. Only in summer time. Feller tell me one time he go fishing out off Isles of Shoals when they shoot those guns. I would not want be there then. I do not like noise. I do not even like railroad noise. But day before yesterday 5 I come back Gloucester by railroad. Twenty cents bus. Fifteen cents railroad. Good day I walk. But day before yesterday it start to snow. I would not get near railroad unless it snow. When I come Rockport first time, everybody work quarry, there are dozen railroads in Rockport. Railroad over Bloodledge quarry, Bay View. Railroad Halibut Point, Folly Cove. Biggest railroad start up quarry in Lanesville come down over Curtis Street back Witch House side of Tool Company to Pigeon Cove dock. Straight railroad. Maybe they had more track over Rockport Granite Company quarry. Not straight but more. [? One time last summer I go over Rockport Granite Company quarry. Etc.?)